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CHAPTER IX.

OF THE CONJURORS, OR RATHER OF THE JUGGLERS AND CHEATS OF THE ABIPONES.

If I remember rightly, no nation which has been discovered in Paraguay is without its jugglers, whom the Abipones call by the name of the devil, Keebèt, or devilish workers, because they believe them to have received from their grandfather, the evil spirit, the power of performing wonderful work far surpassing human art. These rogues, who are of both sexes, profess to know and have the ability to do all things. There is not one of the savages who does not believe that it is in the power of these conjurors to inflict disease and death, to cure all disorders, to make known distant and future events; to cause rain, hail, and tempests; to call up the shades of the dead, and consult them concerning hidden matters; to put on the form of a tiger; to handle every kind of serpent without danger, &c., which powers, they imagine, are not obtained by art, but imparted to certain persons by their grandfather, the devil. Those who aspire to the office of juggler are said to sit upon an aged willow, overhanging some lake, and to

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756 [787] abstain from food for several days, till they begin to see into futurity. It always appeared probable to me that these rogues, from long fasting, contract a weakness of brain, a giddiness, and kind of delirium, which makes them imagine that they are gifted with superior wisdom, and give themselves out for magicians. They impose upon themselves first, and afterwards upon others. But in reality they differ from the rest in nothing but the superior ability of concerting frauds to deceive others. Indeed
811 it is no difficult matter to cheat ignorant and credulous savages, who account every new thing, which they have never seen before, a prodigy, and immediately attribute it to magic art. Once when I happened to make some roses of red linen, to adorn the church, the Indians watched me at my work with much interest, wondering at this imitation of nature, and exclaiming, "This father is either a magician, or the son of a witch." A European lay-brother of our order astonished the Indians by turning something of wood, with much skill and expedition, and was consequently spoken of by them all as the prince of magicians; for till that day they had never seen a turning machine, nor any thing turned. Were they to behold fireworks, optical glasses, the experiments of the air-pump, and many other things,

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181 A light rumour, smoke seen from a distance,
649 strange foot-marks, or the unseasonable barking of dogs, fills them with suspicions that their lives are in danger from the enemy, especially when they dread their vengeance for slaughters which themselves have lately committed. The
756 task of tranquillizing and preparing their minds
787 devolves upon the jugglers, who, whenever any thing is to be feared, or any thing to be done, consult the evil spirit. About the beginning of the night a company of old women assemble in a huge tent. The mistress of the band, an old woman remarkable for wrinkles and grey hairs, strikes every now and then two large discordant drums, at intervals of four sounds, and whilst these instruments return a horrible bellowing, she, with a harsh voice, mutters kinds of songs, like a person mourning. The
[533] surrounding women, with their hair dishevelled and their breasts bare, rattle gourds, and loudly chaunt funeral verses, which are accompanied by a continual motion of the feet, and tossing about of the arms. But this infernal music is rendered still more insupportable by other performers, who keep constantly beating pans which are covered with deers' skin, and sound very acutely, with a stick. In this manner the night is passed. At day-break all flock to the old woman's tent, as to a Delphic oracle. The singers receive little presents, and

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are anxiously asked what their grandfather has said. The replies of the old women are generally of such doubtful import, that whatever happens they may seem to have predicted the truth. Sometimes the devil is consulted by different women, in different tents, the same night. At day-break one party will pertinaciously assert that the enemy are on the approach, which the other as obstinately denying, a conflict of opinions ensues between these foolish interpreters of oracles, which generally ends in a bloody quarrel. Sometimes one of the jugglers is desired to call up the shade of a dead man, from which they may immediately learn what their fates reserve for them. A promiscuous multitude of every age and sex flocks to the necromancer's tent. The juggler is concealed beneath a bull's hide, which serves in the same manner as a stage-curtain. Having muttered a few extemporary verses, sometimes with a mournful, at others with a commanding voice, he at length declares that the shade of such a person, whoever the people choose, is present. Him he interrogates over and over again on future events, and, changing his voice, answers to himself whatever he thinks proper. Not one of the auditors dares to doubt of the presence of the shade, or the truth of its words. An Abipon of noble family and good under-

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standing, used many arguments to convince me that he had with his own eyes beheld the spirit of an Indian woman, whose husband was then living in our town. Spaniards also, who have lived from boyhood in captivity amongst the Abipones, are quite persuaded that the shades of the dead become visible at the call of a necromancer, that they reply to questions, and that there is no deceit used in the business. But what sensible man would credit such witnesses, who are in the daily habit of deceiving and being deceived?

But from this custom of the savages of calling up the shades of the dead, we may deduce that they believe in the immortality of the soul, as may also be collected both from their rites and conversation. They place a pot, a garment, arms, and horses, fastened on stakes upon graves, that the dead may not be in want of the daily necessaries of life. They have an idea, that those little ducks, which the Abipones call *ruililiè*, and which fly about in flocks at night, uttering a mournful hiss, are the souls of the departed. The Spaniard Raphael de los Rios, who superintended the estate belonging to the town of St. Jeronymo, was cruelly murdered in his tent, in an assault of the savages, whilst I resided there. Some months after, an Abiponian catechumen came and anxiously enquired

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at the time of the eclipse. But, who would believe that the Peruvian Indians, so much more civilized than the rest, should be foolish enough to imagine, that when the sun is obscured, he is angry, and turns away his face from them, on account of certain crimes which they have committed? When the moon is in darkness, they say she is sick, and are in perpetual apprehension, that, when she dies, her immense carcass will fall down upon the earth and crush all the inhabitants. When she recovers her light, they say she has been healed by Pachacámac, the Saviour of the world, who has prevented her death, that the earth may not be utterly crushed and destroyed by her weight. Other crazy notions are entertained by other Americans concerning eclipses. The Abipones call a comet *neydc*, the Guaranies *yacitatà tatatîbae*, the smoking star: for what we name the hair, beard, or tail of a comet, they take to be smoke. This star is dreaded by savages, being accounted the forerunner and instrument of various calamities. The Peruvians have always believed the comet to portend the death of their kings, and the destruction of their provinces and kingdoms. Montezuma, monarch of the Mexicans, having frequently beheld a comet like a fiery pyramid, visible from midnight till sun-set, was greatly alarmed for himself and for his people, and shortly after conquered and slain by Cortez

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self and for his people, and shortly after conquered and slain by Cortez.

Let us now return to the superstitions of the Abipones, who think another star, the name of which I have forgotten, portentous, formidable, and destructive. They say that those years in which this star has been seen have always proved bloody and disastrous to their nation. When a whirlwind drives the dust round in a circle, the women throw ashes in its way, that it may be satisfied with that food, and may turn in some other direction. But if the wind rushes into any house with that impetuous whirling, they are certain that one of the inhabitants will die soon. If any live bees be found in the honey-comb, which they bring from the woods, they say that they must be killed out of doors, imagining, that if this be done within the house, they shall never be able to find any more honey.

The Abipones labour under many superstitions, because they abound in jugglers, the teachers of superstition. The most famous at the time that I lived there, were Hanetrâln, Nahagalkin, Oaikin, Kaëperlahachin, Pazanoirin, Kaachl, Kepakainkin, Laamamin, and Pariekaikin, the first, and by far the most eminent of them all, who had obtained a high reputation for his prophecies and other peculiarities of his office. Female jugglers abound to such a de-

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along with it to the same subterranean abode. The Abipones, who do not credit such idle tales, believe that some part of them survives the death of the body, and that it exists somewhere, but they openly confess themselves ignorant of the place and other circumstances. They fear the manes or shades of the defunct, and believe that they become visible to the living when invoked by a magic incantation, to be interrogated concerning future things. As I was passing the night on the banks of the Parana, the Abipones, my companions, hearing their voices re-echoed against the trees, and windings of the shores, attributed the circumstance to ghosts and disembodied spirits wandering in these solitudes, till I explained to them the nature of an echo. They call little ducks, which fly about in flocks at night uttering a mournful hiss, the shades of the dead. These, and other circumstances, which I have related elsewhere, prove that the Abipones believe in the immortality of the soul.

It is incredible how religiously the Abipones perform the sepulchral honours of their friends. If they see one of their comrades fall in battle they snatch the lifeless body from the midst of the enemies to bury it properly in its native soil. To lessen the burden, they strip off the flesh and bury it in the ground; the bones they put